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AN EASTER SERMON —

PHILLIPS BROOKS

With loving Easter greeting
from
Eleanor Baldwin.

14. April, 1895.

THE LIFE HERE
AND
THE LIFE HEREAFTER

AN
EASTER SERMON

BY THE
RT. REV. PHILLIPS BROOKS, D.D.
LATE BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF MASSACHUSETTS

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THE LIFE HERE AND THE LIFE HEREAFTER.

“ If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.”—I COR. xv. 32.

WHEN St. Paul speaks to us we know that his few words are giving us only glimpses of what is passing in his mind ; they are mere flashes on the surface out of the depths below. In these words, which I have taken for my Easter text, he is thinking evidently of that vast subject upon which the mind of man has always lingered with a painful interest and fascination, the subject which all the associations of to-day set us to thinking of—the subject of the two lives, the life here and the life hereafter, the earthly life and the resurrection life, and what they have to do with one-another. He remembers his own life. Once he went to Ephesus. He excited great hostility, he met with violent

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persecution there. It is not recorded that he was ever compelled to fight with wild beasts for his life, in the amphitheatre of that great pleasure-seeking city. That may have been ; but it seems more likely that he uses the expression metaphorically to describe the fight which he had there to make against the human enemies of the truth which he believed in. That all comes back to him. He thinks, " Was it worth while to do it ? " If it is all over so soon ; if there is no future life into which such a struggle can project its issues ; if a few years pass away and then it is all just exactly as if the fight had not been fought—what was the use of it ? Whether I fought or surrendered, whether I was brave or was a coward, a little while, a very little while, and it will make no more difference than whether one of the dead brutes, whose life is over, struggled obstinately or gave up pusillanimously when they stabbed him to his death. Why should we struggle and fight ? Why not let it go ?

Our first thought is that Paul when he speaks so is not at his best. He is depressed.

His tone is low. "It does make a difference, Paul," we want to say. "It does make a difference. What you fought for seemed to you to be the truth; and even if it is to perish utterly the next moment, the soul must keep its truthfulness, and die, if it does die, bravely fighting for what is right. This thing is absolute and is superior to consequences. Suppose there is no future life; suppose the man who bravely does right lays down forever that life which he surrenders for his righteousness; still the essential character of the act remains. Even if it makes no difference a hundred years hence, it makes a difference now. The absolute right and justice has its present value. Though the star is to be quenched in a moment forever, it is good that the star should shine its brightest to the very last. This is the instinct of the brave and healthy heart that is faithful to its truest impulses."

And all that we know of Paul makes us sure that he could not have been insensible to such thoughts as these. His was just the nature to feel them most intensely. He was

always in the power of the absolute nature of things. He was no mere mercenary weigher of consequences—no puppet of rewards and punishments. That the right was to be done simply for its own righteousness, no matter what came of it, was a truth that he would have held and taught more strongly than any other man that ever lived. Certainly there have been men who, with almost no intimation, at least with a very vague and elusive vision, of another life, have done brave and faithful deeds even with vast sacrifice and suffering. Such faithfulness has belonged, indeed, only to the very noblest spirits, and even with them we cannot but believe that some influence of the eternal nature of the acts that they were doing must have unconsciously inspired them, and that even with them the addition of an expectation of immortality to all their plans and purposes must have given them larger scope and made their lives even more faithful than they were in their patient and unhoping conscientiousness.

But with St. Paul, remember, there was a

special reason why all his labor went for nothing if there were no such thing as a resurrection. That was the very doctrine for which he had suffered. Jesus and the resurrection, that was what he had preached. All his life's work failed if that were gone. He looked back to the time when to an immortal Christ assuring immortality to all men he had committed all his powers—given himself up entirely. He saw the years stretching between that time and this—years bright and glorious if the truth to which he had dedicated them were true, but unspeakably dreary if it were indeed all a delusion; and with this thought he cried out: "What advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?" "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." He was willing to trust his whole life there.

But let us leave St. Paul, and let us speak on Easter morning of that general idea which his words suggest, that the best and bravest things which we are called to do always need something more than this life to complete and jus

tify themselves in. That seems to be his idea, that the muscle is taken away from struggle, and the strength is taken out of patience, if you shut down upon either of them the close door of death and offer them nothing beyond. As men live to-day not making plans for to-morrow perhaps, but yet making always such plans for to-day as presuppose that there will be such a thing as a to-morrow ; as we can feel that our hands would drop from all their busy tasks, and our brains stop spinning away at all their eager problems, if it were to become known to us that all was to stop forever with the setting of to-day's sun—so this wider view declares that a palsyng sense of uselessness would fall upon the best activities of this world if Death were the end and there were no Easter prospect of an open immortality beyond. Some things, the lower things, no doubt, we should still keep on doing—feeding ourselves, amusing ourselves, trading and playing and talking with one another—but all our higher activities, and especially all high and difficult self-sacrifice, would wither under the

blight of such a dreadful limit set to life. Let us look at this truth.

What is it that makes man sacrifice and deny himself, can you tell me? Why is it that wanting to do one thing dreadfully, with all these fiery passions driving me to it, I yet have a power, and sometimes use that power to say, "No! I will not do it;" to say to the lust, "Down; you shall not be gratified"? What makes a man thus put his pleasure by, and sacrifice himself? There are two answers only. One declares that the man gives up his present happiness to win some higher happiness yet to come. Another says that he gives up happiness in obedience to an absolute authority of the right. Duty is stronger than passion in his nature. The second answer sounds the loftier, but yet I am inclined to think that the two answers are not really two, but one. I am inclined to think that man in his highest idea is right when he thinks that duty and happiness go together; that if the world were not disordered, if God's idea ruled freely through the currents of our human life, a conscious enjoyment, in-

tense and true, extending even to the mere outermost symbols of pleasure, physical delight, the joy of the senses, could go along with every doing of a right, good thing. There is a deep instinct in man's soul that goodness and happiness belong together. He keeps telling himself that they do. He says to himself: "Be good, and you will be happy." He sees hundreds of people who are good, who yet by any test that he can apply are not happy; but still he clings to his adage with a faithfulness that can only be grounded on a blind belief that somehow or other, somewhere or other, it must yet come true.

Now, if this instinct of man is right, then certainly it follows that self-sacrifice cannot be accepted as the permanent law of life. I believe here is the fundamental instinct that sets man's eager eye to searching for an immortality. Man said, "I am made for enjoyment, but I cannot let this nature of mine out to enjoy itself freely without running into what my conscience tells me is sin. I am made to do right, but I cannot do what is right always without making

myself suffer with cramping and crushing and breaking down these appetites which are eager to enjoy. I can understand it, if this self-denial be a temporary, preparatory thing, if some day duty and joy are to be simultaneously perfect. I can understand it and willingly repress myself, if so a new self is to be made within me that is to indulge itself forever, in the highest activity winning always the highest delight. But self-sacrifice forever I cannot understand. Struggle that never issues into peace is horrible." And then he looked round and saw that his life was all too short and too confused. There seemed no hope that before he got up to that dark wall which opened to take all his fellows in out of his sight, the circumstances seemingly all the way up to the wall continuing still the same, he could escape this struggle and issue into that perfect harmony of duty and desire which was the worthy object of his life. What then? Was there a world beyond? Did the weary soul live again in a higher life where struggle and self-sacrifice could never come, but where the peace which should bathe it and make it young

forever should be the cheaply won fruit of the long sacrificing of self which had gone on here? If there were such a new life, then struggle was well worth while. If there were not, then all this struggle was not worth while; it was all wrong and not good. "If I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?" This, next to that simple sense of life and dread of dying which is in the very substance of the soul itself, I think is the great natural argument for a resurrection and an immortality. Men found they must sacrifice joy to duty, but they could find no sufficient warrant for such a sacrifice except in the belief that the sacrifice was only temporary, that finally the two must come together again and remain together forever, joy being the eternal flower of duty, or belonging to it as the sunshine belongs to the sun. A heaven of eternal self-sacrifice, no religion has ever pictured.

If you think about it you will see that such an argument otherwise stated comes to this—that a part, a fragment is wretched and un-

accountable if you try to treat it as if it were a whole ; but if you accept it as a part and treat it so, treat it with reference to a larger whole to which it belongs, then it at once is beautiful and intelligible. How many illustrations of that we see everywhere ! Childhood is healthy, good, and beautiful, as one section of human life, bound to and prophesying the others that are to follow it by strong fibres of anticipation that it sends forward. But childhood as a life by itself loses its poetry, is frivolous and empty, as you see when any weak nature grows up to years of manhood or womanhood and yet remains forever nothing but a child.

So the individual is mean and poor if you think of him alone as if God made him for what he personally is, for what he personally can accomplish ; but set the individual into the race and see him there and then, no matter how insignificant he is, the veriest hewer of wood or drawer of water, and he is respectable with the accumulated dignity of the humanity of which he is a part. One period of history, again, is

tame and flat ; but put it into the majestic story of man's career that sweeps across the sky so mightily, and it is as if you picked one pale star out of the cold horizon where the prying telescope could just discover it, and set it in the midst of the glories of the Milky Way. There is a startling and unreal attraction often about a fragment that we try to fancy into an independent whole, but the highest and purest taste delights in those perfect wholes which God constructed as the final unities, and is always anxious to find for every part its proper relation to and place in them. As Kingsley says :

“ To be a whole is to be small and weak :
To be a part is to be great and mighty,
In the one spirit of the mighty whole.”

Apply all that for yourself to the life that man lives on this earth. I glory in the sense which man has always had, that if this life is a whole it is poor, unintelligible, and contemptible. If it is a part knit to the eternities, before, behind, one fragment of a great moral unity whose issues are to everlasting—then it is beautiful and sublime, and suggests a thousand exqui-

site explanations even of its darkest and most puzzling mysteries. In such a sense I see a glimpse of its own proof. It is a reaching of the part after the whole, of the child-soul for the God-soul, of time for eternity; and when a man dares to think of these years here of his own life, not as a whole, but as a part of a larger whole which is to be taken up and to go on forever, then it is wonderful how his existence which seemed to him so mean grows in a moment beautiful, interesting, significant, and stirs in him the deepest sense of responsibility and the profoundest reverence for his own immortality.

I need not stop here to remind you of the countless ways in which this highest view of our life as a fragment of a larger whole is forced upon us by so much with which we are familiar. The broken edges everywhere! The half-finished tasks that men have to leave and go into the darkness! The young careers so full of promise that suddenly stop! The great ideas and wishes, growing legitimately out of earthly life, yet evidently too large for

it, finding no satisfaction here! And most of all the unfinished characters! I can think that it is no great thing for a man to die with his fortune half made, or his barn half built; but that he should die just as his character is rounding into shape, and from a crude study becoming a picture of beauty and an engine of power, this is what most bewilders us. This is what most of all, I think, has made men guess that this earthly life we see is a part and not a whole, and set their eyes pathetically searching for that other world they thought must be beyond the waters. This fighting with beasts! This struggle for character that left the clay so shapeless still when night fell, what use was it unless a morrow were to come? This fighting with beasts, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?

And now comes Easter morning! What does it mean? Do you not see? Every old guess and dream and hope becomes suddenly lighted up with certainty. Lo, it is true! Death is not the end of all things. Here is a man, the truest, realest man (we often forget

that about Jesus Christ, but so He was), the realest man that ever lived, He died, and see, He still lives. Then we too do not die in death. We thought so. Now we are sure of it. This life here is a part, not a whole. It is worth while to struggle, however shapeless and crude the work is when we have to lay it down over night, for there is a to-morrow coming. It is worth while to fight with beasts at Ephesus, for the dead do rise!

Do you not see? Here is where the resurrection of Christ, the firstfruits of them that slept—assuming the essential immortality of the human soul, and so promising the resurrection of all men—here is where it touches the lives of men directly, and discriminates between those of us who are making this earthly life a whole and those of us who, however blindly, are feeling that it cannot be a whole, but must be merely a part of some larger whole, and are treating it so every day. The risen Christ is already the judge of the lives of men.

For see how He touches the man who has

determined that this life shall be all—shall be a whole itself. Here is a man who has shut all his desires and efforts up in this few years which he sees to be the course of men on earth. He has folded in the ends of all his plans, and made everything snug for this little voyage of three-score years and ten at most. “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!” It is not always the excited bacchanalian cry or the moody utterance of desperate sullenness, which it ordinarily sounds. It is the practical voice that issues from the sober, decent, reputable lives of thousands of well-esteemed people, who have simply shut up their lives within the limits of this world, and expect and make arrangements for no more. “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!” It is a sound that we hear not merely through tavern windows, but, if we listen clearly enough, out of the doors of the best warehouses of the city, and from the anxious bustle of our overdriven household life. What sense is there in fighting beasts? Why should we vex ourselves with great principles, with the progress of the soul,

with the problems of the infinite? To-morrow we die. Simple, frank, reputable worldliness. Suppose to such a man there comes the revelation of the Easter morning. To-morrow you do not die. To-morrow you begin to live. Look through this broken tomb door outside Jerusalem. Lo, it has never been closed since the stone was rolled away, and the guards fell on their faces, and the angels shone in the brightening morning, and Jesus came forth, centuries ago. Look through and see—what? The great whole of which this that you are trying to make a whole out of is but a little part. See the immortal life in which goodness, truth, purity, unselfishness, high affections, the love of God, and sympathetic charitable brotherhood with men are to be the only things that are worth having, the only valuables; and then turn and look at your life, and try to fit it against this whole of which it is a part. Where in your life are the hopes too large to find satisfaction here, to which the fulfilments of this other life belong? Where is that service of God to which God only can give completeness?

You have got nothing here that you can take there. All that you need there, you have despised here. What has your world to do with that world? Woe unto you rich, for ye have received your satisfaction. Is not that man's life judged by the risen Christ?

But is there not another sort of man to whom another kind of judgment comes from the Easter revelation that this life is to complete itself in the life that is to come? He has been vaguely feeling that there must be something beyond those gates. He has been so continually unsatisfied. What did it mean, this affection that was just going to round itself out from a fretful, jealous, fastidious taste into a calm and restful love, and all of a sudden saw its object snatched out of its sight and was left reaching out its hands and peering into the darkness? What did it mean, this unaccountable impulse to work hard, to give up present comfort, to dare all sorts of dangers, in behalf of intangible thoughts and principles which were always eluding him, which half the world laughed at and said were the mere phantoms

of his excited brain, but which yet had such a power over him that he could not let them go? This is the life the man has lived. Restless, unsatisfied, reaching forward, doing his duty day by day, but always hearing every duty that he did prophesy to him its own incompleteness and tell him he was made for greater things. He was like a man living in a room across which a painted curtain hung. Other men said the curtain was no curtain, but a solid wall, that what they saw was all the room, and they sat them down contented so. But he could not rest. He saw the cornice lines not ending where the curtain cut them. He saw a lack of symmetry in what of the room was on his side the curtain, that kept him always uneasy, made him sure this was not all.

And what was Easter to that man? The lifting of the curtain! The showing of the room beyond! The justification of his life! The sight of the broken lines unbroken, running on infinitely! The bringing of Life and Immortality to light! "Yes, you are right," it said. "Your part is but a part. Look

though and see the whole. It is wise and good to live for, to live in that whole already!" Is not that man's life, too, judged by the risen Christ?

For remember throughout what the new world is which Christ reveals by His resurrection. It is not a mere extension of this life. It is not merely more of this, the same thing going on infinitely of which we have a certain small specimen here. That were such a poor revelation, not really worth our knowing. If we are living only a carnal life, it does not really matter much how long that life will last. It would have been but a dreary thing if Christ's rising from the grave on Easter Day had only told us that forever and forever we were to go on living the same life, doing the same things, carrying up and down upon an everlasting earth the same characters which we are carrying here. It would have made life dreadful, I think. Many of us have characters, live lives, with which we are well enough satisfied when we give them their fit duration. A mere life of pleasure, a mere life of selfishness,

it is pleasant enough to think of when it is to last a few years or a few decades; but make it immortality, and it becomes terrible. There is not one of us, the triflers of society and the drudges of business, who, if you made him fully understand that he was to do just that forever and forever, either here or in some gold and jasper city, would not stand aghast. The life of the ephemeral insect loses its beauty, grows tawdry and ugly, unless it dies to-night, if you leave it over until to-morrow. And so when Christ by His resurrection opens a longer life to us, it is distinctly another life, a larger life, a life of more demands, of more spiritual duties and companionship, than this. No one can read the Gospels that describe our Lord after His resurrection without feeling something of what He would make known to us about the resurrection life. There is a difference in Him. His flesh and blood is flesh and blood still, but it is more spiritualized. It comes and goes with less observation. Everything seems to impress upon us this, that the life on which He entered and

on which we enter through Him after death must be a life of spiritual affinities, of less gross, material, corporeal experience ; a life where the characters of our spiritual natures, and not the mere condition of our bodies or the circumstances that surround us, shall determine our enjoyment or our pain. Let us catch this idea and then see what a spiritual influence the resurrection of Christ must have upon this life that we are living now. It compels us to contemplate another sort of life to come beyond the grave. Some day we are to go forth in our spiritual responsibility and to meet the demands of spiritual existence. The soul, buried under the cares of life, thrills when it hears such tidings as that. Is it ready—is it anyway getting ready—for such resurrection? See how the whole evangelical experience starts with such an intelligence. The soul brought face to face with its destiny feels its utter unfitness for it. Sin and stain are on its garments. It must have some deliverer. It must find its Deliverer there, whither it is going, in that spiritual world for which it feels its unfitness,

for which it must be fit. It cries out for Christ. Christ comes, and the mysterious work of pardon and regeneration passes between Him and the soul; and then the soul, with a spiritual immortality now set clearly before it, goes to work to struggle with itself, to conquer down its yet remaining sin, to win Christ perfectly, to be good, pure, and holy. To struggle with itself! That struggle becomes worth while when it sees what a destiny is opened up before it. If the more external struggles of our lives, the struggle with the outer enemies of truths and principles, become profound and interesting, become worth the fighting when we think about eternity, a hundred-fold does this inner struggle, this self-conquest, seem well worth while if we believe in the rising of the dead. Not merely to fight with beasts at Ephesus, but to fight with the sins in our own hearts, is the task which Easter Day inspires with reasonableness and courage and hope.

It is very interesting, I think, to consider what must have been the enlightenment which

the certain news of Jesus' resurrection brought to many who had been His half disciples in Jerusalem, who had wanted to believe all that He had preached, but had been perplexed and bewildered by its immensity. Such a man had heard Jesus tell about the spiritual life. He had heard Him say not many days before, standing in the great temple with the multitude around Him, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." He had wanted to come. Something in him had blindly answered to the invitation, but it seemed so large, so much too large for this little man's little meagre life. What time was there, what room was there, for such an experience of the spirit between these narrow walls, between the birth and death that crowded so closely upon one another? A few days later the Teacher Himself died. What chance had even He had to develop His great ideas and purposes and live the life He taught His followers? But three days later new tidings came. That was not all! That was only the beginning. He is not dead. He cannot die. He lives forever,

and in His everlasting life ours also is included. What then? With an eternity to live it in, the life that he had yearned for might not be impossible, after all. Here was time and room infinite, enough. The dying echoes of the hopeless invitation must have revived themselves in the poor Hebrew's ears, and setting himself to what no longer was a hopeless task now that he saw where Jesus was able to lead him, into what an eternity, how near to God, he must have followed his new, risen Master with all his devoted heart. In St. Paul's phrase, he was risen with Him.

My dear friends, those are the sort of people to whom the Gospel of the Resurrection brings its great message. Those are the people for whom the Saviour rose. Those are the people to whom I wish that I could rightly speak the message that belongs to Easter Day. It is not merely to overcome that natural tremor at the thought of dying which belongs to every man. It certainly is not to promise that the mere luxury of living, used here for

nothing but mere selfishness, shall be renewed as selfishly as ever on the other side of the dark river. It is not these—but if there is a soul bewildered with the greatness of spiritual duty and spiritual possibility when he compares it with the littleness of life, the message belongs to him. He wants to be good. He wants to live not for the flesh, but for the spirit. He hears the voice that is calling him to undertake a brave and manly struggle after purity and holiness and honesty and God. He hears the beasts of Ephesus—sin, sensuality, corruption—roaring at him, and he is moved to go and fight them. But life seems too short and little. If he does go, he goes hesitatingly and hopelessly. It would indeed be a blessed work if one could show to any such fighter with sin the eternity in which his victory is laid up with his Lord's. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." Courage would now run down from such a sight into all the little obscure tasks of life, as the sunlight runs into every open crack and corner of the uni-

verse when the sunrise comes. I beg you, in whatever struggle you find yourself set by God, to take courage from Easter Day, and believe that it is well worth while to fight it out, however hard it is, because there is a resurrection from the dead—the dead do rise.

You can test the work that you are engaged in in the world by seeing whether it needs, whether it is restless and cramped without the truth of, an immortality. If it is not, if you can do your little fight just as well without any hope of an eternity, be sure the fight that you are at is a poor one, is not worthy of your highest powers—is too small a fight for a man, a child of God, to spend his life in fighting.

The world's poor heart knows very well what it wants. For years and years it longed to see one man rise from the dead. If it could only have that! It could let many other questions go unanswered, but, oh, for some light on that darkness—oh, for some sound out of

that silence! If it could have that, then its bonds would be broken, its whole pale life flooded with color, its best truths verified completely, and a hope lighted upon every grave. No longer should spiritual philosophy labor under the burden of materialism; no longer should the dying die in terrible doubt, and the mourners go hopelessly about the streets. My friends, the world's prayer is answered. A true man has risen from the grave. Life and immortality are brought to light.

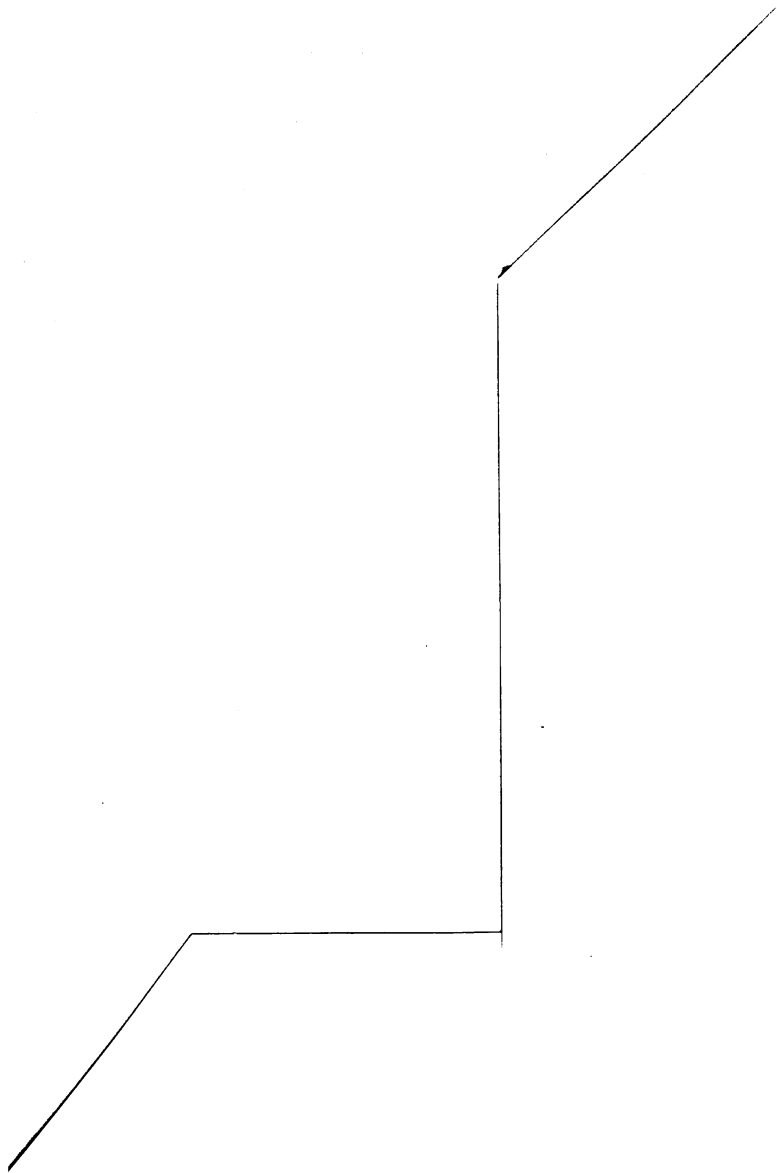
I cannot speak to you to-day without thinking how since last Easter Day death has been here among the people of my parish. I look about and I remember so many, in every varying age, the baby with its earliest dearness, the boy, the strong young man with all his fair bright life before him, the father, the mother of the household, the veteran servant of God, and the young eager soul just laying hold of Christ's mercy and His service. How many they are that have gone from us since last spring! How dear they were to you whom

God has taken! What a year of death it has been! I think that Easter Day with its thoughts of death and resurrection never meant so much to so many of us as it does this year. May I not call on you to-day, with a new faith in your Redeemer, to put away every low sorrow that the year has brought, and to lift up your hearts to the highest sorrow for your dead, which is not sorrow but joy, joy and thanksgiving to God for the completed life on which they have entered, and in which they wait for us, and which God makes clear to us by the Saviour's resurrection? O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? For now is Christ risen from the dead.

To you who have long been servants of Christ, and to you especially, my friends, who on this happy Easter Day are for the first time to testify your new glad service of Him in His holy Sacrament, I offer now this table spread with the memorials of our crucified and risen Lord. Let us eat and drink with Him and live.

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May He show Himself to us and feed us with Himself, and make us strong with faith to live even now the everlasting life.



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